Life Transitions of Lesbian and Gay Filipinos in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

Mary Pauline Namoca
Department of Psychology
Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines

Mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs), unions in which one partner is heterosexual and the other identifies as a sexual minority, remain understudied in the Philippine context precisely because the country's rigid heteronormative legal and cultural framework has historically directed research attention toward heterosexual relationships, leaving mixed-orientation and other non-normative unions largely unexamined. This qualitative study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the lived experiences of six self-identified lesbian and gay Filipinos (five gay men, one lesbian woman) in MOMs. Grounded in Husserlian phenomenology and Prospero Covar's Banga framework from Filipino Psychology, the study explored how participants entered, navigated, and integrated their homosexual identities within heterosexual marital structures. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using IPA's hermeneutic process. Four superordinate themes emerged, organized under the acronym RUNWEY: Reasoning (converging antecedents into marital union), Unfolding (management of identity disclosure), Weathering (relational consequences of homosexuality), and Yielding (identity integration). Entry into MOMs was shaped by both internalized motivations, including love and procreative desire, and contextual influences, including familial pressure and identity uncertainty. Disclosure dynamics varied by the timing of sexual identity recognition and produced distinct patterns of openness and concealment in marital and parent-child relationships. Despite persistent sociocultural and relational challenges, participants demonstrated resilient integration of identity. These findings underscore the need for culturally informed psychological interventions and more equitable legal frameworks for sexual minorities in the Philippines.

Keywords: mixed-orientation marriage, lesbian and gay Filipinos, interpretative phenomenological analysis, Sikolohiyang Pilipino, identity disclosure

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Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Mary Pauline Namoca, Ph.D,
Email: nyraangie.cabantug@ust.edu.ph

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is often assumed to align with sexual orientation, yet for a substantial number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals worldwide, marital life unfolds within a heterosexual union that does not match their sexual identity. A mixed-orientation marriage (MOM) is a union in which one partner is heterosexual and the other is a sexual minority who experiences same-sex attraction (Corley & Kort, 2006; Yarhouse et al., 2011). Such marriages arise from diverse and intersecting motivations: genuine love for one's partner, the desire for children and family (Giunti & Fioravanti, 2016; Lee, 2002), societal and religious pressures (Hopwood et al., 2019; Zulkffli et al., 2022), internalized homophobia and the hope that marriage may resolve same-sex attraction (Corley & Kort, 2006; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015; Legerski et al., 2017), and cultural norms of filial and marital obligation (Song et al., 2022, 2023). These motivations are neither uniform nor predictable; Benack and Swan (2016) caution against academic frameworks that pathologize MOMs or reduce the relational choices of sexual minorities to essentialist narratives.

Research on MOMs has documented a complex psychological landscape for the sexual minority partner. When homosexual identity is concealed, many individuals manage the tension between same-sex desire and marital identity through compartmentalization, a coping strategy in which the sexual minority partner mentally separates same-sex desire from marital and family roles so that each can be maintained without consciously confronting the contradiction between them; for some, this eventually extends to engaging in overt same-sex acts outside the marriage (Daly et al., 2020; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015). This strategy, however, carries a psychological cost: concealment is associated with existential anxiety, fear of exposure, and remorse (Daly et al., 2020; Hopwood et al., 2019), and the emotional quality of the heterosexual marriage predicts life satisfaction and loneliness more strongly than the quality of any extramarital same-sex relationship (Shao et al., 2021). When disclosure occurs and is met with acceptance, depressive symptoms and loneliness decrease and relationship satisfaction increases (Li & Samp, 2021). Couples who survive disclosure often renegotiate their shared marital values from sexual to non-sexual dimensions, such as friendship, co-parenting, or spiritual connection, through a process of relational deconstruction and reconstruction (Reid et al., 2021). Involuntary discovery, by contrast, typically produces shock, betrayal, and diminished self-worth in the straight spouse (Legerski et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2012), underscoring the importance of commitment and forgiveness to post-disclosure relationship quality (Kays et al., 2014). Gender further shapes MOM experiences: religious culture amplifies sex-based asymmetries in sexual satisfaction (Bridges et al., 2019; Dehlin et al., 2019), and while

gay fathers and lesbian mothers generally report better sexual functioning in same-sex relationships than in prior heterosexual ones, internalized homophobia can persist after the transition for the former (Fioravanti et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, MOMs exist within an especially constraining sociocultural context. Marriage is legally defined as a permanent union between a man and a woman (The Family Code of the Philippines, 1987), and the Philippines is one of only two countries worldwide without legal divorce (Sheykhi, 2020), making annulment, a process that is costly, slow, and inaccessible to many (Abalos, 2017), the primary recourse for marital dissolution. The Family Code explicitly identifies concealment of homosexuality as grounds for annulment on the basis of fraud, a provision recently affirmed by the Supreme Court of the Philippines (2025). Roman Catholic influence reinforces heteronormative marital norms, and although attitudes among younger Filipinos are shifting toward reflexive spirituality and greater acceptance of cohabitation (Amoyo et al., 2025; Kuang, 2025), same-sex unions continue to face stigma rooted in scriptural interpretation (Ochoa et al., 2016) and institutional religious exclusion (Libiran et al., 2024). LGBTQ+ individuals and same-sex couples lack legal and social support networks available to heterosexual couples, with marginalization intensified by rural location and socioeconomic disadvantage (Cardona et al., 2025; Montaño et al., 2022).

Despite this context, MOMs in the Philippines have received limited scholarly attention since Lee's (2002) foundational study of gay and bisexual Filipino men in heterosexual unions. Global literature has also focused disproportionately on gay and bisexual men (e.g., Corley & Kort, 2006; Daly et al., 2020; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015; Zack & Ben-Ari, 2019). While the current literature has described gender differences in post-separation sexual functioning (Fioravanti et al., 2021), sexual and relationship satisfaction, and mental health outcomes (Bridges et al., 2019; Dehlin et al., 2019); and the influence of sociocultural constraints in lesbian women's identity development and marital decision-making (Ujagare & Sahay, 2026; Ji et al., 2021), lesbian women within existing heterosexual marriages have rarely received dedicated inquiry (e.g., Ben Shlomo & Oreg, 2022), rendering their experiences in MOMs remain largely invisible. These lacunae motivate the present study, which examines the lived experiences of self-identified lesbian and gay Filipinos in MOMs. In contributing to LGBTQ+ Filipino Psychology and responding to recent legal developments, this study aims to inform culturally grounded psychological practice and policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two complementary frameworks: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), rooted in Husserlian phenomenology, and Prospero Covar's Banga from Sikolohiyang Pilipino. Phenomenology attends to lived experience through reflective, introspective inquiry and examines how individuals make sense of their world (Larsen & Adu, 2021; Qutoshi, 2018; Reeder, 2010), an approach first articulated by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl. IPA extends this tradition into research practice: participants make sense of their experiences, and researchers, in turn, interpret how participants have made sense of those experiences, a process known as the double hermeneutic (Nizza et al., 2021). Because IPA is idiographic, attending closely to individual cases rather than aggregating across a sample, it is well suited to exploring the complex, contextually embedded experiences of a marginalized population (Larkin & Thompson, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

Covar's (1998) Banga (pot) metaphor describes Filipino personhood (pagkatao) as composed of three interconnected dimensions: labas (the exterior, or social self), loob (the interior self, encompassing hiya [sense of propriety], pakikiramdam [empathy], and utang na loob [debt of gratitude]), and lalim (depth, comprising kaluluwa [spirit] and budhi [conscience]). Applied to the present study, this framework illuminates how outward conformity to heteronormative expectations (labas) may conflict with inner desires and identity (loob), producing tensions negotiated through the moral and spiritual depth of the self (lalim). Together, IPA and Covar's Banga provide a culturally grounded and psychologically sensitive lens for understanding how sexual minority Filipinos construct and sustain identity within mixed-orientation marriages.

In practice, IPA shaped every stage of data collection and analysis: interview questions were designed to elicit detailed, first-person accounts of marital and identity experiences rather than to test predetermined hypotheses, and analysis proceeded case by case before cross-case patterns, RUNWEY, were identified (see Data Analysis). Covar's Banga, in turn, supplied the interpretive vocabulary used to organize the findings: each RUNWEY theme is discussed in terms of how labas, loob, and lalim interact for participants, allowing the discussion to move beyond a purely Western psychological reading of concealment and disclosure toward one grounded in Filipino conceptions of selfhood. Used together, IPA supplied the analytic procedure and Covar's Banga supplied the cultural lens through which the resulting themes are interpreted.

METHOD

Design

This qualitative study employed IPA to examine the lived experiences of homosexual Filipinos in MOMs. IPA was selected for its emphasis on individual meaning-making and its suitability for sensitive, under-researched topics (Smith et al., 2022). Its double hermeneutic process, described above, supported a deeply reflexive engagement with the data throughout data collection and analysis (Nizza et al., 2021).

Participants

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants who were Filipino, self-identified as gay or lesbian, and currently or formerly married to a heterosexual spouse. Because a MOM is defined as a union between a heterosexual partner and a sexual-minority partner, all six relationships in this sample involved one heterosexual spouse; none involved two partners who both identified as sexual minorities, which would fall outside the scope of a MOM as defined in this study. Six individuals participated: five gay men and one lesbian woman. Ages at the time of interview ranged from 40 to 58 years; ages at marriage ranged from 20 to 37 years, placing the approximate span between marriage and interview at 3 to 38 years across the sample. Participants resided in Baguio City, Ilocos Sur, and Laguna, spanning urban and provincial settings. One participant (Rica) had been informally separated since 2019 but had not initiated legal proceedings. Based on the disclosure timing reported in the Findings (see Unfolding), four participants disclosed their sexual orientation to their spouse before marriage (Foundational Acceptance), and two, one gay participant and the lesbian participant, recognized or disclosed their orientation only after the marriage was established (Selective Self-Disclosure); Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics. Smith et al. (1999) note that samples of up to ten participants are appropriate for IPA; the present sample size reflects both the idiographic focus of the approach and the logistical challenges of recruiting from a highly stigmatized and legally vulnerable population. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Age at Interview	Age at Marriage	Marriage Duration	Residence	Disclosure Timing
Emod	40	25	15	Baguio	Selective Self-Disclosure
Rica	49	37	6 years (Separate	Ilocos Sur	Foundational Acceptance

			d 2019)		
Alfie	58	32	25	Baguio	Foundational Acceptance
Yna	52	28	24	Baguio	Foundational Acceptance
Alec	52	20	38	Ilocos Sur	Foundational Acceptance
Yuzu	47	27	20	Laguna	Selective Self-Disclosure

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the lead author and student researchers via Messenger and Zoom. An a priori interview guide was developed based on existing literature, with open-ended questions inviting participants to reflect on antecedents to marriage, experiences within the marital and family unit, and processes of identity navigation. Informed consent was obtained through a bilingual (English/Filipino) form prior to each interview. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using orthographic transcription; member checking and spot-checking verified accuracy. Participant recruitment combined digital outreach through social media with in-person engagement in public spaces such as markets and beauty parlors, an approach grounded in the Sikolohiyang Pilipino concept of pakapa-kapa, an exploratory orientation toward unsystematized data (Torres, 1982). The study received ethical clearance from the Research, Innovations, Sustainable Extensions (RISE) Office of Saint Louis University. Data were stored in secure, access-restricted digital folders, were accessed only by the research team members and were deleted 20 weeks after the completion of data treatment and member-checking as defined in the team's approved protocol. In compliance with the SLU Data Privacy Manual (2023), physical documents containing research data were destroyed using cross-cut shredders, while digital files were securely erased using evaluated and tested secure-erasure methods to securely dispose of data gathered. No generative artificial intelligence tools were used in the collection, transcription, analysis, or interpretation of participant data. Claude was used to improve the grammar, spelling, and readability of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following IPA's stages as described by Alase (2023) and Smith et al. (2022): initial reading and re-reading for immersion; descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual noting in the margins;

extraction of meaning units, condensed meaning units, and codes following Colaizzi's (1978) warm and cool analysis procedure; dendogramming; development of emergent themes; and cross-case analysis to identify convergence and divergence across participants. A master table of themes was constructed to represent the group-level analysis while preserving individual variation (Larkin & Thompson, 2022; see Table 2). Reflexivity was maintained throughout via reflective journaling (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2022). Volunteer psychologists were available for debriefing; none were required.

FINDINGS

Four superordinate themes, organized under the acronym RUNWEY, characterize the life transitions of participants: Reasoning, Unfolding, Weathering, and Yielding. Each theme contains subthemes reflecting both convergence and divergence across the six accounts (see Table 2 for the master table of themes).

Table 2

Master Table of Superordinate Themes and Subthemes (RUNWEY Framework)

Superordinate Theme	Subtheme	Brief Description	n
Reasoning: Converging Antecedents into Marital Union	Internalized Motivations	Personally meaningful commitments (desire for children, romantic love, partner's prior acceptance of identity) motivating entry into marriage	5
	Contextual Influences	Social/situational pressures (unplanned pregnancy, absence of queer-affirming spaces, familial pressure, peer modeling)	5
Unfolding: Management of Identity Disclosure	Foundational Acceptance	Pre-marital disclosure; identity accepted as a precondition of marriage	4
	Selective Self-Disclosure	Post-marital recognition/disclosure; shared only with select confidants	2
Weathering: Relational Consequences	Marital Dynamics	Sexual dissatisfaction; renegotiation toward companionate partnership	6

of Homosexuality			
	Religiosity and Moral Negotiation	Guilt, self-restraint, and compartmentalization shaped by Catholic moral teaching (hiya, budhi)	2
	Parent-Child Relationships	Paternal commitment; children's bullying and eventual acceptance	3
Yielding: Identity Integration	Positive Self-Appraisal	Integration through sustained companionship and meaningful parenthood	2
	Integration through Painful Trajectories	Integration via infidelity, separation, or unresolved concealment, reached through authenticity, acceptance, or compartmentalization	4

Reasoning: Converging Antecedents into Marital Union

Entry into a MOM emerged not from a single factor but from the convergence of personal aspirations and sociocultural pressures.

Internalized Motivations. Five participants entered marriage out of deliberate, personally meaningful commitments**.** The desire for biological children and family life was the most prominent, particularly among gay men (i.e., Emod, Rica, and Alec), who understood heterosexual marriage as the only available pathway to biological parenthood, consistent with Lee's (2002) finding that having children ranks among the primary reasons gay Filipino men marry women. Participants described this aspiration with clarity and conviction: marriage was a natural or necessary step toward fulfilling life goals, not a compromise or subterfuge. As Rica's account exemplified: *"I tried to get married, because I wanted to have a baby. For same-sex relationships, you cannot have children."* For Yna, the motivation was romantic: love had developed gradually from friendship and emotional connection, challenging essentialist assumptions about the incompatibility of homosexual orientation with heterosexual attachment. Three participants (i.e., Alfie, Yna, and Rica) who had self-identified prior to marriage described their partners' acceptance of their sexual identity as a direct precondition for entering the relationship**,** grounding the marital union in explicit mutual understanding. Through Covar's (1998) framework, these motivations reflect the loob: deeply held interior convictions that organize and direct personal life choices.

Contextual Influences. Social and situational factors played an equally significant role. For participants who had not yet consolidated their sexual identities at the time of marriage, unplanned pregnancy accelerated entry

into heterosexual unions. The absence of accessible queer vocabulary and culturally affirming spaces (i.e., gender-diverse social networks) constrained identity exploration, a constraint that Alec linked directly to the heteronormative environment of the Philippines in the 1990s, prior to his marriage, comparing having an LGBTQ+ child in that era to a "family curse"**.** Familial influence, above all parental guidance, functioned as a powerful catalyst across five cases: whether through direct pressure to take responsibility following pregnancy (Emod and Yuzu), or parents' discovery of miscarriage during cohabitation (Yna); implicit modeling of heterosexual orientation as the norm at an early age or fear of family discovering their divergence (Emod and Alec); or explicit reminders of future caregiving expectations (Alfie). Witnessing gay peers enter heterosexual marriages also normalized the trajectory for Alfie. These factors reflect the labas, the external social world, which, in interaction with the loob, produced decisions that were personally coherent within participants' specific cultural and familial contexts.

Unfolding: Management of Identity Disclosure

Disclosure of sexual orientation within a MOM is not a discrete event but a process shaped critically by when sexual identity is recognized. Two distinct dynamics emerged, each producing a different relational configuration.

Foundational Acceptance. Participants who had consolidated their sexual identities prior to marriage disclosed this to their spouses before the union, establishing mutual knowledge and acceptance as a structural precondition of the marriage. For these individuals, transparency was not a revelation that disrupted an existing relationship but an integration: identity was woven into the commitment from the outset, so that the spouse entered the marriage already aware of, and having accepted, the partner's sexual orientation. For instance, acceptance in Yna's case was described as an explicit negotiation in which he asked his spouse, "*Do you accept a gay husband?*" to which she affirmed, *"It's not bad to be gay, so long as when you have a family, we are your priority."* Yna identified this mutual agreement as the foundation of their relationship, emphasizing that his spouse accepted him without demanding that he abandon his sexual identity. Disclosure was accompanied by explicit negotiation of household rules governing fidelity and sexual expectations. As Alfie expressed, *"I lay all my cards to her. I confessed, "I am gay," "I will not bring men inside the house, and we have house rules, baby","* illustrating how disclosure was paired with explicit boundaries within the marriage. When disclosure extended to children, timing was careful and calibrated to the child's developmental readiness; three fathers, specifically Alfie, Yna, and

Alec, reported that children's eventual acceptance brought profound relief and paternal pride. Outcomes reported by these participants align with existing literature linking intentional disclosure to fewer depressive symptoms and greater relationship satisfaction (Li & Samp, 2021; Reid et al., 2021). This pattern, which the present study terms foundational acceptance, reflects an early alignment between the loob and labas: because inner identity and outward social role were reconciled from the start, the lalim functioned as a stabilizing rather than conflicted force in the marriage.

Selective Self-Disclosure. Participants who recognized their homosexual orientation within an established marriage disclosed selectively, confiding only in a trusted friend or children, while concealing their identity from their spouse or the wider family. Emod had married while uncertain of his sexual identity, hoping marriage would resolve his ambivalence. After recognizing his persistent same-sex attraction, he maintained the outward performance of fatherhood while keeping his identity hidden from his children and largely unspoken with his wife. Though he never officially came out to his wife, he believes she knows he is attracted to men. He views their ongoing sex life, which he initiates despite a lack of genuine sexual attraction, as a balancing mechanism that proves she accepts his sexuality, congruent with Zack and Ben-ari's (2019) finding that satisfying a wife's sexual and emotional needs is one factor enabling gay men to resolve the tension arising from the duality of their identities. He extends this image to his children by adopting a masculine physical appearance, working in a male-dominated job, and fulfilling his marital role by providing for their financial needs. Yuzu described a gradual identity awakening during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly twenty years into her marriage, facilitated by exposure to LGBTQ+ content online. With no culturally safe space to disclose to her husband, she has shared it only with her children and a close friend, with no intention of coming out to her husband. This decision is also shaped by the emotional distance in their marriage, which she describes as lacking romantic affection and maintained primarily for the sake of appearances and out of respect for their extended family. In both cases, concealment functioned not as denial but as a negotiated strategy for preserving relational stability: the loob was selectively expressed across relational contexts, while the labas remained aligned with expected marital roles.

The timing of identity crystallization thus produced qualitatively distinct trajectories of disclosure: early recognition enabled integration, while late recognition produced a pattern this study terms contextually calibrated authenticity, in which identity is expressed selectively rather

than fully disclosed, calibrated to which relationships feel safe enough to hold it.

Weathering: Relational Consequences of Homosexuality

Participants' homosexual identities reverberated through their marital, moral-religious, and parent-child relationships, producing a landscape of adjustment, strain, and renegotiation.

Marital Dynamics. Sexual dissatisfaction was pervasive. Participants described the cognitive and physical strategies required to engage in heterosexual intercourse, including sustained mental effort, the use of same-sex fantasy, or the discontinuation of gender-affirming medication. Rica, Emod, and Alec acknowledged an inability to offer what they experienced as genuine sexual presence to their wives. Over time, some couples, based on Alfie, Yna, and Alec's accounts, renegotiated the marital relationship toward a companionate model, prioritizing partnership, shared caregiving, and mutual respect over sexual intimacy, a process consistent with the deconstruction-reconstruction described by Reid et al. (2021). In Rica's case, relationship dissolution was precipitated by a fundamental mismatch in marital expectations, as the wife's desire for full relational transformation conflicted with the participant's vision of companionate partnership. Consequently, this marriage ultimately resolved into separation (going seven years at the time of the interview), an outcome experienced by Rica as integral to the attainment of self-acceptance even at the cost of his parenthood plans:

> "I already know that I can't satisfy my wife's needs. So I've come to the point where I'm sure, so there are no more issues. It's a real sacrifice. I also wanted to have a baby, I wanted to have a partner, someone to be with for life, but that's gone."

Religiosity and Moral Negotiation. Among participants whose marriages were built on foundational acceptance, instances of same-sex infidelity emerged but were framed as consistent with their orientation rather than as a rejection of their wives. Both participants who disclosed infidelity had subsequently rededicated themselves to marital fidelity, one through a religious vow following his child's medical crisis, the other through compartmentalization of same-sex desire, which involved employing self-control and recognizing the lack of commitment to the other person to frame this desire as sexual rather than romantic. As the participant explained, *"It's just sexual. Perhaps I have great self-control because I do not get committed to them; I don't enter relationships with gay people and men*"**.** This pattern differs from the 'initiated concealment' documented by Adler and Ben-Ari (2017), in which post-disclosure

concealment increases; here, fidelity to the spouse, rather than full openness about one's sexual life, was the operative norm. Religiosity shaped these negotiations in complex ways: for Alec, guilt over same-sex infidelity was rooted in childhood moral teachings, producing a vicious cycle of self-restraint and capitulation that he managed by treating extramarital encounters as purely physical, a form of compartmentalization consistent with Daly et al.'s (2020) account of gay married fathers. This compartmentalization offered the minimum relief and satisfaction, attributing it to his acceptance of his own convictions and sexual needs, as encapsulated by his statement, *"I am only human"*. The interplay of hiya and budhi in Covar's (1998) framework illuminates these dynamics: propriety and conscience function simultaneously as constraints and as moral guides in participants' navigation of competing relational obligations, a persistence plausibly rooted, in the Philippine context, in the same Catholic moral socialization discussed in the Introduction, in which concealment of homosexuality carries both religious and legal weight.

Parent-Child Relationships. Participants demonstrated strong parental commitment, consistently prioritizing their role as fathers despite challenges associated with non-normative gender expression. Gay fathers expressed anxiety about children's acceptance and a perceived inadequacy in modeling traditional paternal masculinity; financial provision was frequently cited as a compensatory expression of paternal care. Children of openly gay fathers (i.e., Alfie, Yna, and Alec) sometimes faced peer bullying and teasing because of their fathers' sexual identity or gender expression; in several cases, fathers intervened directly with teachers and other parents. These confrontations consistently revealed a pattern in which the father's homosexuality, rather than other children's aggressive behavior, was positioned as the problem, reflecting the labas-level pressures that marginalize non-normative family structures (Isidro et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, many children demonstrated acceptance and even pride in their fathers, and relationships were marked by ongoing mutual respect. Alfie and Yna's accounts revealed moments of hesitation, mistrust, or embarrassment before acceptance developed. Alfie recounted an incident in which his then-grade school child ran away from him after seeing a classmate at the mall, as she did not want the classmate to see her father sporting blonde hair. Eventually, he turned things around by adjusting his self-presentation: "*I said, 'Okay, I'll just dye it black.' So when they saw it, it went out okay. You have to be respectable too.*" Yna's narrative, in contrast, was more lighthearted, saying, *"By the time they were old enough to understand things, 'Papa, you might still be running around with men there, huh?'* to which he playfully reassured them with, *'How could I be running around with men? If I were doing that, you guys*

wouldn't have had any more siblings.'' The parent-child relationship thus reflects continuous negotiation between the loob, parental commitment and care, and the labas of societal scrutiny and heteronormative expectation, with children functioning as both a source of strain and a profound source of meaning.

Yielding: Identity Integration

The final theme concerns how participants came to understand and integrate their identities as sexual minorities in or formerly in MOMs, based on the accumulated affective weight of their experiences across the marriage.

Yna and Alfie, with predominantly positive marital and familial experiences, marked by sustained companionship, reciprocal respect, and meaningful parenthood, arrived at positive self-appraisals that held together gay identity and parental or spousal roles without internal contradiction. For these participants, complexity did not preclude pride; identity was constituted through and alongside relational challenges rather than despite them, consistent with Shao et al.'s (2021) evidence that marital quality is more predictive of well-being than any extramarital relationship.

Participants who had navigated more painful trajectories, including infidelity, separation, or sustained concealment, arrived at integration through different affective routes. Rica, the lone separated participant, described post-marriage life in terms of authenticity and freedom, aligning with Hopwood et al.'s (2019) finding that identity integration resolves the inner crisis of the homosexual spouse regardless of whether the marriage continues. Alec accepted his history of infidelity as a normal feature of his life as a gay man in a MOM, framing acceptance rather than condemnation as the path to equanimity. Yuzu, while regretting the years spent without access to her identity, viewed her children as the enduring and meaningful outcome of her marriage, holding regret and gratitude simultaneously. Emod compartmentalized his homosexual identity as separate from his paternal role, pledging to maintain his fathering commitment until the end of his life. This finding is consistent with Daly et al.'s (2020) observation that some married gay fathers identify privately as gay while sustaining their marital identity externally.

Across all cases, yielding was not a tidy resolution but a continuing process. Covar's (1998) framework illuminates this integration as a dynamic alignment of loob and lalim: inner self and moral-spiritual depth working together, over time and through accumulated experience, to generate a self-understanding livable within the structures of each participant's actual life.

DISCUSSION

The RUNWEY framework captures the life transitions of lesbian and gay Filipinos in MOMs as a non-linear, dynamic process in which individual agency and sociocultural constraint are continuously co-constitutive. The diversity of motivational pathways documented in Reasoning challenges any assumption that sexual orientation predetermines relational choice, reinforcing Benack and Swan's (2016) critique of academic tendencies to pathologize MOMs. The centrality of familial influence as a contextual motivator, particularly parental expectation, reflects the salience of kapwa (shared identity) and utang na loob in Filipino relational ethics, extending literature that attributes MOM entry to compulsory marriage norms and filial obligation (Song et al., 2023).

The two disclosure dynamics documented in Unfolding reveal that disclosure is not simply an event with consequences but a process shaped by when and how identity itself crystallizes. This finding enriches existing literature on disclosure outcomes (Li & Samp, 2021; Reid et al., 2021) by demonstrating that the timing of identity recognition structures the entire relational configuration of the marriage. The lone lesbian participant's late identity recognition, occurring nearly two decades into her marriage, is particularly notable. It resonates with findings from other conservative, non-Western contexts, such as Ujagare and Sahay's (2026) account of Indian women who did not recognize their same-sex attraction until well into adulthood, alongside the influence of patriarchal expectations, pressure to marry, and limited opportunities for identity expression. Correspondingly, Ben Shlomo and Oreg (2022) found that lesbian women in Israel's ultra-Orthodox Jewish community navigated tensions between their sexual identities and religious and familial expectations via concealment within heterosexual marriages. This may point to a broader pattern of delayed identity formation and sustained concealment among sexual minority women in culturally conservative settings. Because this study includes only a single lesbian case, this pattern should be treated as a hypothesis for future research (see Conclusion) rather than an established finding. Conversely, the aforementioned participant's shared disclosure timing with a single gay participant posits that sexual identity development is not solely gender-specific but shaped by historical and social context, access to information, and familial and social pressures—a multiplicity of cultural factors identified by Song et al. (2022) in a separate account of married Chinese gay and bisexual men.

Weathering underscores the relational costs of MOMs for all parties while documenting participants' capacity for adaptive renegotiation across marital, moral-religious, and parent-child domains. The shift toward

companionate marriage across multiple cases is consistent with Reid et al. (2021), while the persistence of societal homophobia in the parent-child domain highlights how structural heteronormativity cascades into the lives of children in non-normative families. Religiosity, examined here as a distinct subtheme given its centrality to the Philippine context (see Weathering: Religiosity and Moral Negotiation), functioned both as a source of guilt and as a moral framework within which identity tensions were partially contained. This ambivalent role of religion, simultaneously constraining and stabilizing, is consistent with patterns documented in other religiously conservative cultural contexts (Zack & Ben-Ari, 2019), and in the Philippine setting is further compounded by the legal weight that Catholic-influenced marriage law attaches to concealment of homosexuality (see Introduction).

Finally, Yielding demonstrates that identity integration is neither uniform nor contingent on any single relational outcome. Participants who remained married, separated, or maintained concealment all arrived at forms of consolidated selfhood through different affective and cognitive routes, affirming that resilience in MOMs is contextually produced rather than dispositionally determined. These findings extend the literature by locating identity integration within a culturally specific personhood framework, Covar's Banga, that captures dimensions of the Filipino self not addressed by Western psychological models.

CONCLUSION

This study documents four interconnected life transitions in the experiences of lesbian and gay Filipinos in MOMs: the convergence of motivations (Reasoning), the navigation of disclosure (Unfolding), the relational impacts of homosexual identity (Weathering), and the consolidation of self (Yielding). Grounded in IPA and Covar's Banga, the findings reveal how Filipino cultural values, namely hiya, utang na loob, pakikiramdam, and budhi, shape each phase of this process within the structural constraints of Philippine law and Catholic moral culture.

For practitioners, these findings call for culturally informed, gay-affirmative approaches that account for the specific configuration of each MOM, including the timing of identity recognition, the extent and nature of disclosure, the presence of children, religious faith, and the client's aspirations for identity integration. For policymakers, the findings underscore the need for caution in interpreting sexual orientation concealment as prima facie fraud, recognizing the complex developmental and sociocultural processes that shape identity timelines. For researchers, the underrepresentation of lesbian voices in this study highlights the need for dedicated inquiry into the experiences of sexual minority women in MOMs, as well as the perspectives of heterosexual spouses and the

children of mixed-orientation families (cf. Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Hoy, 2024). Future work should also examine gay husbands and other sexual minorities, such as bisexuals, through continued phenomenological investigation, to enrich empirical understanding of MOMs within the Filipino context and beyond.

This study is limited by its small sample size, which is appropriate for IPA but limits generalizability, and by the challenges of recruiting participants from a highly stigmatized and legally vulnerable population; future studies could address this by extending recruitment timelines, partnering with LGBTQ+ community organizations, or using multi-site designs to reach a larger and more geographically diverse sample. The predominance of gay men in the sample, with only one lesbian participant, limits what can be concluded about sexual minority women's experiences in MOMs specifically; as noted above, dedicated studies focused on lesbian and bisexual women in MOMs are needed to address this gap. The RUNWEY framework offers a culturally grounded account of life transitions in MOMs that may inform future comparative research across Asian and other non-Western contexts.

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